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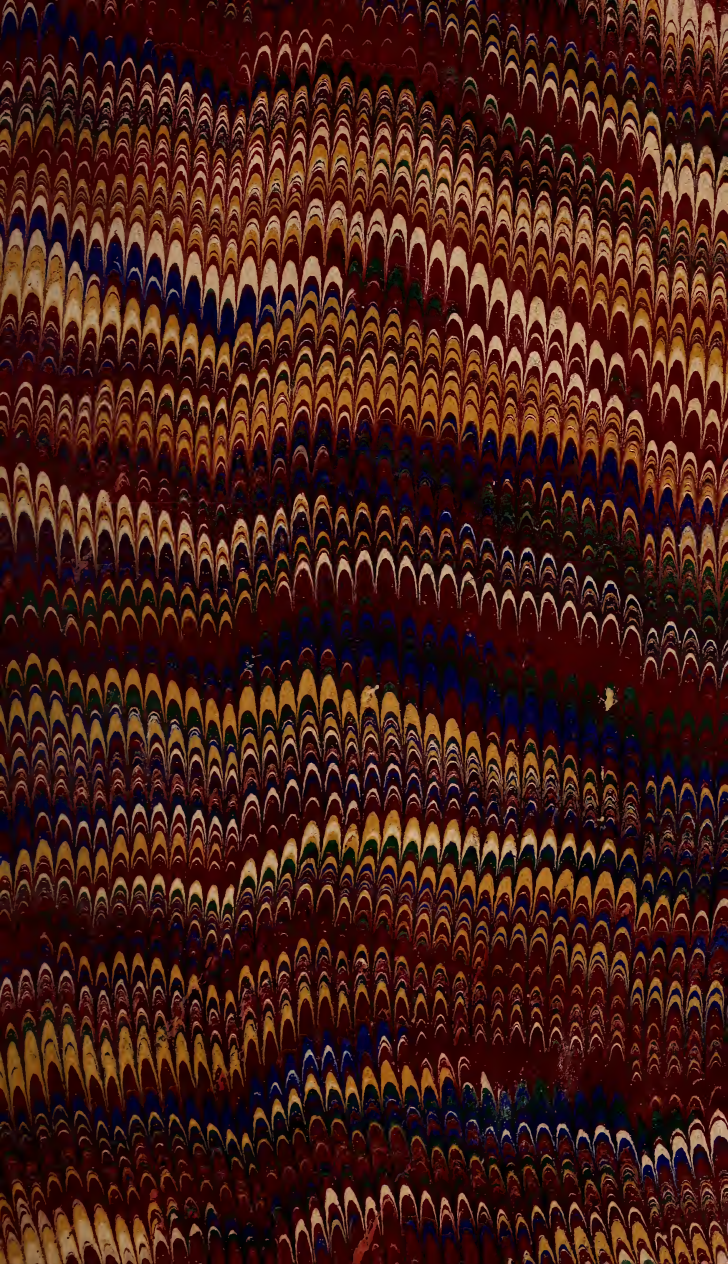
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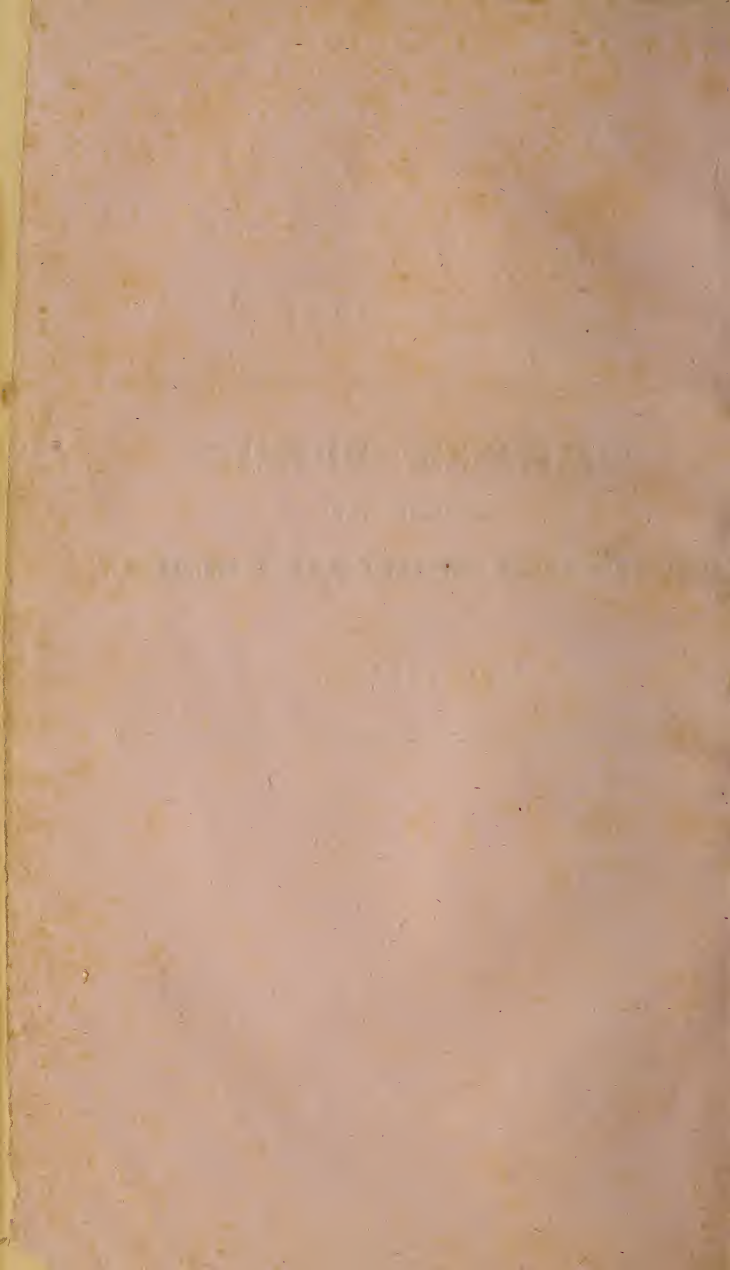
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CANDID HINTS

CONCERNING THE

PROTESTANT EPISCOPAL CHURCH.

MDCCCXXXIII.



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CANDID HINTS

CONCERNING THE

PROTESTANT EPISCOPAL CHURCH.

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FOR THE "NEW YORK PROTESTANT EPISCOPAL TRACT SOCIETY--DEPOSITORY
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CANDID HINTS

CONCERNING THE

Protestant Episcopal Church.

Every traveller feels it is important for him to know that the road he is journeying upon is a direct one, and will lead him to the place where he wishes to arrive. The serious-minded man will feel that it is of vastly greater importance for him to know that he is in the road to heaven, and that the way he is pursuing will bring him there. To satisfy himself of this, there are several things which he must seriously consider. The first is—to what church do I belong? This may appear a strange question, and it is greatly to be regretted that there is a necessity for asking it—for in fact there is but one church. God never established two churches. Christ is not the head of two bodies. His body, which is the church, can no more be divided than can the human body. If any one wishes to be perfectly satisfied of this, let him read what St. Paul says—"He (that is Christ) is the head of the body—the Church." (Col. i. 18.) And again,—“There is one body and one spirit, even as ye are called in one hope of your calling.” (Eph. iv. 4.) And again, he exhorts, “That there should be no schism in the body.” A great many people think very lightly on this subject, and say, it is a matter of no consequence to what church a man belongs, so he is truly religious:—but who does not see how silly it is to talk after this fashion? If it was of no consequence, why was

a church established at all? If a church has been established, and that church is the body of Christ, unless we are members of it, how can we be the members of Christ? Moreover, God has made many promises to his church, and both reason and the scriptures, teach us that his blessing must be upon it. Many think that where the multitude flock there is the church. But this is a very false rule of judgment: for various sects have arisen from time to time, and have been exceedingly popular in their day, and then have dwindled away. And this must always be the case, however flattering the prospects may be for the present. "Every plant which my Heavenly Father hath not planted shall be rooted up." Matt. xv. 13. But further, the church has its ministry; not a ministry which commenced yesterday, but that which had its beginning in the days of Christ, and received its authority from him. In our day, people are apt to regard a man as a minister who has authority to preach the gospel given to him by any religious society, but they do not ask themselves where did that society get the authority they pretend to delegate. Suppose some twenty, thirty, or more persons think proper to form themselves into a society and to ordain ministers—have they power to do so? If so, ministers have no special commission from God. Some say, why surely such and such a man, who is not regularly (Episcopally) ordained, preaches the gospel as well, if not better, than many who are. So a man who is not the agent for another may be able to transact his business better than the man who is the true agent; nevertheless, in all matters of trust and responsibility the acts of the agent alone are valid. The church has its sacraments; now who are to administer these? why those surely who have authority to do so. It would be in vain for any to say that they had the seal of one to an instrument who had no authority to sign it; it would be a poor plea to say, why look at it, he writes a better hand than the true agent. The question would be, had he a right to sign it?

But it will be very natural to ask where is this church with its ministry and sacraments? It is a very general

impression among the uninformed that the Roman Catholic denomination was the first church. This, however, is a great mistake. The first christian church was established at Jerusalem, and afterwards other churches in its more immediate vicinity, before the church at Rome was constituted. In the primitive day, the Church of Rome stood no higher than any other church; but as Rome was a great city, the church by degrees assumed authority and power until it grew to the monstrous height which it now has attained. The ground upon which the Romanists claim this power is, that St. Peter was the Bishop of Rome, and that upon him the church was built. To show how untenable this is, there is no evidence that St. Peter was ever Bishop of Rome, nay, it is not certain that he ever was in that city. So that even if we were to admit the interpretation they put upon those passages of scripture which they bring to prove the supremacy of their church, they would have to prove that they were applicable to them more than to the Church of Jerusalem, Antioch, or any other that might be mentioned. If they had taken St. Paul as the founder of their church they would have had a more plausible argument, for we know from the scriptures that St. Paul was at Rome, and we have an epistle written by him to that church. But this would not have suited their purpose; so, without any scriptural authority, and with very doubtful human tradition, they have made St. Peter their Bishop, and claimed from him all their authority. Every one sees at a glance how absurd this is.

The true statement is this—when Jesus Christ constituted the ministry (as you may read, John xx. 21, 22, 23,) he gave authority to his apostles to commission others, and we learn from sacred history, as well as from the history of the primitive age, that they ordained three grades in the ministry: and, as in point of fact, no one apostle was superior to another, so no bishop was superior to another bishop—but wherever this ministry existed there the church existed. So now, wherever there is a regular succession from this source, there is a valid ministry: there is the true church. I say succession, for

it will not do for a man simply to call himself a bishop, or for a society so to call him. For no man can have a just authority which he has not regularly derived. Now there is but one regular source from whence the ministerial commission can come, that is Christ; and but one regular channel for its transmission, namely, that which we have pointed out. Wherever this succession is, there is the church; and, although there are many branches, there is but one body, but one trunk, and one root. It is, therefore, you perceive, very needful for us to determine to which church we belong, as many important consequences are connected with it.

By the rule laid down, we of the Protestant Episcopal Church are the members of Christ, for the church is his body. They who are rightly and truly instructed will highly appreciate this blessing. Too many, alas! like Esau, have parted with their birth-right. That schism is a sin no one ought to question; yet, how many have joined with those who have rent the body of Christ—yea, so common has this rending become, that many cease to regard it as unlawful. The church is no longer looked upon as the church of God, but as of human creation, and therefore to be changed and fashioned after every whim and fancy. But can this be so? Was it not established upon settled and immutable principles?

Independently of the primary and essential duty of being attached to the true church, we shall point out some of its benefits, and in doing so, we shall consider them as enjoyed by us who are members of the Protestant Episcopal Church. And first, we have secured to us a form of sound words: by which I mean a scriptural liturgy. It is in vain that the doctrinal articles of any communion are orthodox, if the conducting of worship be left without restriction to one individual: for example, if the individual conducting the services becomes heterodox, how natural and easy is it for him, having all in his own power, so to fashion his prayers as to keep out of view altogether his false sentiments? What is here supposed has often actually happened. But where there is a liturgy the clergyman must use it. This, if he

is an honest man, he cannot continue to do longer than he accords with it in his own conscience; at all events, he must use it, and this prevents him from secretly undermining the faith of the people. Now if this was the single advantage of the liturgy it would be conclusive for its use. But it has many other advantages. It secures the propriety of public worship; it prevents those low and frequently irreverent petitions which are heard in extemporary prayers; it prevents hesitation, embarrassment, and vain repetitions; it prevents trifling and personal allusions; it takes away all temptation to display *gifts*; and, above all, it secures the great object in view, namely, prayer. This, in extemporary addresses, is often lost in exhortation or in doctrinal statements. But here I must notice an objection which is made to our liturgy. It is said to be tedious. Now let us examine this: The morning service occupies, we will say, one hour and a quarter; this is a large allowance, for I am persuaded usually it does not take up so much time. To say nothing of the immodesty of complaining of devoting one hour and a quarter to the worship of God, how groundless is the charge of tediousness when we consider how the service is varied and the excellence of its constituent parts. The relief of the body and mind are both consulted, by changing the position of the body and the attention of the mind. The time is not spent in any one continued act. Let us see how it is divided: We have in it the reading of the scriptures, one lesson from the Old Testament, and another from the New; a portion of the psalter, the commandments, and the epistle and gospel. What an admirable provision is here made for the sound instruction of the people. Between the reading of these portions of the word of God, we have the most solemn and affecting prayers, a brief and comprehensive confession of faith, and sublime acts of praise: these so arranged as to relieve and properly succeed each other. To the devout mind there can be no tediousness here. The cause why any become weary is, they take no part in the service; many, (to their shame be it spoken,) never open a Prayer Book with the serious purpose of

joining in the devotions of the church ; so do they neglect this, that some who have been in the constant habit of attending church would be at a loss to follow the minister through the different parts of the service. That they who look on simply as spectators should become weary is not to be wondered at : the great excellence of a form of common prayer is that all by using it may become worshippers. The object in going to church is not to hear prayers or to see others pray, but to pray ourselves.

Here may be a proper place for me to notice some popular objections which are made to our baptismal office. It is said we hold that by baptism persons are regenerated or converted. Now let us fix the true meaning of these terms. In all languages words are found that have become obsolete, that is, out of use, or that have changed their meaning. As the church was not established yesterday, her language is old fashioned ; with her, regeneration and conversion do not mean the same thing. By regeneration she means a change of state ; by conversion she means a change of character. No one before he is baptized is in covenant with God ; when he is baptized he is brought into covenant. This is the effect of baptism, or it has no effect or meaning at all. Here then is a change of state, and a very important one. This the church terms regeneration ; so do the scriptures ; so do all the early writers. It is from losing sight of this that so many have come to think lightly of baptism ; they regard it as a mere form and ceremony ; they forget that God has appointed it as the door of admission into his church, and that it is the seal of his covenant ; that it confirms all the blessings of that covenant, the chief of which is the grant of the Holy Spirit. Conversion or renovation is added to this in those who become truly pious, otherwise baptism avails nothing. This is the apostle's doctrine when he speaks of "the washing of regeneration and renewing of the Holy Ghost." Tit. iii. 5. The washing of regeneration or baptism is one act, but conversion or renovation, the renewing of the Holy Ghost, is not so, as too many have falsely and dangerously concluded, but must be going on constantly

until the end of life. This is clearly the doctrine of the scriptures, as you may learn from our Lord's telling his apostles, and that too after they were apostles, that they must be converted. (Matt. xviii. 3.) If conversion was one single act, and they already had been converted, it would have been out of place to tell them that they must be converted again.

Some object to the promises which sponsors are required to make in behalf of those who are baptized. They say it is more than they can perform; that it is not in their power to compel children after they grow up to do what they have promised they should do. This objection is founded in ignorance. Sponsors do not promise that they will make the child "renounce the devil and all his works, the vain pomp and glory of the world," &c. They do not promise to make the child "believe all the articles of the christian faith as contained in the apostles' creed." They do not promise to make the child "obediently keep God's holy will and commandments." What they promise is, that the child shall "be taught so soon as he shall be able to learn the vow and obligation that is upon him." They promise to provide for his religious instruction, and that he shall be "virtuously brought up to lead a godly and a christian life." This is their "parts and duties."

What they promise in the name of the child, not what they will make him do, may be illustrated in this way: A parent, or other person having authority, may enter into covenant or engagement for a child; that covenant may be an exceedingly advantageous one, but it has conditions, and these the child must comply with or it must lose the benefits of the covenant. If I promise, in the name of my child, that when it comes to a certain age it will do certain acts, upon the performance of which it is to receive a large inheritance—when it comes to that age I am not to force it to do the acts; they must be done willingly. If the child complies, it is to its gain, if it refuses, it is to its loss. So sponsors enter into covenant for children, and they are brought within the conditions of the covenant; if they refuse or neglect to conform to

them, the consequences fall upon themselves and not upon their sponsors. The fact is, baptism of itself brings the child under obligation to "renounce the devil," &c. Were there no sponsors, and no such promises made in words, still the very act of baptism would amount to the same thing, and be precisely the same obligation. The questions put to the sponsors, and their answers, explain in words what this sacrament always does in fact. They show clearly what the covenant is, on the part of the child, as effected by that rite.

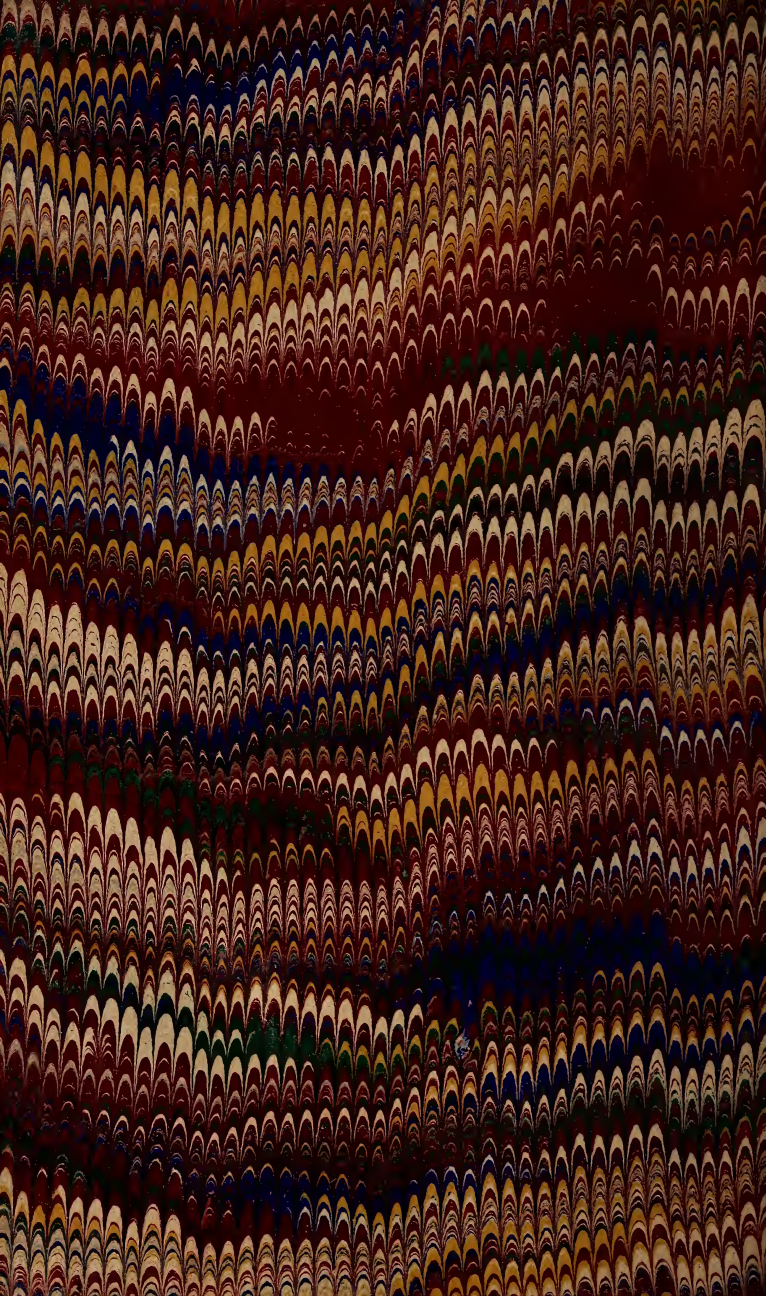
From these examples you may learn that if any other objections are raised against our service, you may readily have them answered by applying to any discreet clergyman of our church, and you will find that they will not only be removed, but the objections be converted into solid reasons for adhering to our communion, and doing so, you will feel that there are duties owing from you to the church of which you are a member.

The first and greatest of these is to preserve its unity. In order to this you must cultivate humility. The source of schism is pride. The leaders of schism throw off restraint, and are ambitious to gain distinction and a name. They who follow them are apt to be influenced by unworthy motives.

All false leaders have flattered the pride, prejudice and weakness of their followers. The church restricts to ministers the conducting of public services. They are the persons appointed to lead the devotions of the people. It is their office to teach and to premonish. It is doubtless very agreeable to the vanity of some to assume these functions, and in many instances miserably do they profane them by their ignorance and extravagance. It is natural for people to love excitement, and many mistake the excitement which these lay administrations produce for fervour and zeal, and thus they are led off from the sober and safe ways of the church—by degrees they come to mistake the working of feeling for the sound affections of the heart, and test their piety, not by practical acts of devotion and duty, the true fruits of the spirit, but by frames and feelings brought on in meetings. But

it must strike every one that that piety which owes its existence to excitement does not proceed from the heart, it does not spring up within, it has its connexion with the nervous system.—Learn you to nourish your piety by reading your Bible in secret, where you may meditate and pray to your Father who seeth in secret. Be you content with the regular assemblings of the great congregation where Almighty God is orderly and solemnly worshipped; where his word and sacraments are rightly and duly administered. Attend to family devotion morning and evening, and withdraw from those agitating meetings, which are well calculated not only to mislead your judgments upon high and important points, but to interfere with the sober discharge of the relative duties of life. In any difficulties which may arise in your religious course, take counsel with him who is set to watch for your soul, and who has a deep responsibility upon him to take a special interest in whatever concerns you. Instil into your children the sound principles of religion; guard them against the inflation of spiritual pride; preserve them from becoming the victims of an artificial system, which will render them unhappy in themselves and unlovely to others; commit them not to the teaching of unqualified and irresponsible persons—teach them yourselves; learn them to imitate the example of Christ, whose “piety (says an old divine) was even, constant, unblameable . . . the instances of his piety were the actions of a very holy but of an ordinary life. . . We are not commanded to imitate a life whose story tells of ecstasies in prayer, and abstractions of senses and immaterial transportations, but a life of justice and temperance, of chastity and piety, of charity and devotion.”

Piety must be steadily maintained. Extravagance and lukewarmness both are its bane. These, like most extremes, are nearly associated. The church guards against them both by the sobriety and spirituality of her offices, and especially by that office in which she so frequently leads us to the table of communion—attend to its admonition—imbibe its spirit. So shall you walk humbly and safely before God . Amen.





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